



# HEARD ACROSS MONTANA

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## Western Border Interoperability Working Group Meeting

By E. Wing Spooner [espooner@mt.gov](mailto:espooner@mt.gov)



The 4th Annual Western Border Interoperability Working Group (WBIWG) met in Lethbridge, Alberta on Wed., April 16. The purpose of WBIWG is to provide a platform for federal, state and provincial coordination of public safety communications and technologies with an emphasis on border areas.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Horsman, Assistant U.S. Attorney, helped to organize the first WBIWG meeting held in February 2005 to discuss radio interoperability issues and begin coordination between local, state, Federal and international public safety agencies along the Montana and Canadian border. Subsequent meetings in January 2006 and April 2007 continued to expand dialogue, coordination and partnerships.

The Lethbridge location was the first time the group met in Canada. Participants were welcomed by the Lethbridge Regional Police Chief Tom McKenzie as well as by Greg Shields, Inspector with Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Customs and Excise Program.

Seven Interoperability Montana (IM) representatives were in attendance, including PSSB staff members Chris Christensen, Scott Bradford, Pete Mohan and Wing Spooner; Glacier County Sheriff Wayne Dusterhoff; and Montana Highway Patrol representatives Larry Irwin and Butch Huseby.



Allan Byer, RCMP K Division Infomatics, spoke to the group about the Province of Alberta's Radio Renewal Program. The province of Alberta and RCMP are collaborating to upgrade a 20-year old communications system. The Alberta First Responder Radio Communication System has been formed with the creation of steering, working, and technical committees as well as a governance model. A basic charter has been established to ensure representation among stakeholders. Objectives are to set the rules for system operation, resolve differences between stakeholders and decide who is allowed to use the 700 MHz system. An RFP will be released shortly to the four vendors

who have been pre-qualified. It is expected that the new system will start to roll out next year.



Chris Lewis, Public Safety Communications Program Manager with the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI), spoke about the Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications (FPIC), an effort to actively address technical and operational interoperability solutions with state, local, tribal and federal partners. The FPIC focuses on interoperability, security, spectrum and standards.

DOI continues to move forward in the field of technology, working with its partners to enhance communications interoperability capabilities, as evidenced by the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the State of Montana that allows federally allotted radio frequencies to be used in non-federal communications systems in Montana.

DOI encourages partnering with other federal agencies and groups and is promoting partnerships with states where there are active DOI missions to help achieve interoperability mandates and needs. Chris emphasized the importance of working cooperatively with Canada, and he commended WBIWG for the important work it is undertaking to help achieve interoperability across borders.



RCMP Sergeant Chris McBryan and George Hawkins, RCMP Engineering Project Manager, spoke to the group about the Alberta IBET Radio Interoperability Pilot Project. IBET stands for Integrated Border Enforcement Team, an integrated bi-national law enforcement team involving agencies from Canada and the United States. This multi-agency law enforcement team analyzes and responds to information gathered from a collection of border agencies in an effort to enhance border integrity and security by identifying, investigating, and interdicting persons and organizations that pose a threat to national security or are engaged in other organized criminal activity.

These organizations are bringing together the expertise and resources of many different police services and agencies on both sides of the Canada-United States border. One goal is to develop interoperable radio communications and to improve and expand existing radio communications through the establishment and evaluation of pilot sites.



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Based on these evaluations, RCMP will explore long-term solutions for cross border communications.



CITY OF  
*Lethbridge*

City of Lethbridge, Public Safety Communications Centre Manager, Chris Kearns, explained that the

PSCC Centre is an integrated police, EMS and fire communications hub that serves the 85,000 residents of Lethbridge and surrounding communities. In 2004, the PSCC Centre consolidated Lethbridge Fire Department and Regional Police Service communications members in an effort to build a strong foundation and to position the PSCC to meet the growing demand for emergency services.

The PSCC Centre employs 17 full-time communications specialists, 4 shift supervisors and 10 "casuals" as well as a manager and an operations manager. About 80% of staff is cross trained to handle a variety of emergency calls. Chris reported that the Centre often take cell phone calls for Toole County, Montana and is able to collaborate on large grass fires. The PSCC Centre's charter is "to provide a quality, cost-effective, independent, stand alone centre for public safety communications services."

**WBIWG Story to be Continued Next Week. . .**

## I-15/90 Corridor Consortium Meeting

By E. Wing Spooner [espooner@mt.gov](mailto:espooner@mt.gov)

The I-15/90 Corridor Consortium met in Butte on Thurs., April 17 at the Butte Chamber of Commerce. Project Director Dave McPherson reported that Jeff Miller, Butte-Silver Bow Director of Fire Services, has submitted the first radio invoice to FEMA for the Assistance to Fire Fighters Grant. As soon as the State security plan is approved, then the State matching money can be submitted for payment. Tom Dunne, Dunne Communications, will compile all information about radio distribution with names of departments, serial numbers, vehicle descriptions and other details. Programming of the radios also has begun. One repeater already has been installed on C-Hill near Anaconda.

Bob McWilliams, Beaverhead County, reported that a Motorola team is coming to Butte next week to perform site surveys at the Butte 9-1-1, the Beaverhead County EOC and Fleecer Mountain in preparation for trunking. Discussion took place about trunking upgrades needed at the Butte 9-1-1 dispatch center. Bob also informed the group about technical

committee priorities and recent discussions about next year's Dept. of Homeland Security funding investments.

PSIC grant money has been approved for Montana's Investment Justifications, and work is underway on site preparations. Permitting is underway for work that is to be performed on Maurer, KONA, Sawtell and VC Hill sites.

Dave McPherson reported that Sheriff John Walsh was elected as the IM Project Director's (IMPD) second Vice Chair at the last IMPD meeting. Dave also is now serving on the IM Business Practices sub-committee.

Bob urged Commissioner Cliff Nelson to have Granite County representatives attend the upcoming IM Retreat. Bob anticipates excellent representation from the I-15/90 Consortium. He also emphasized the value of the <http://interop.mt.gov> website.

The next consortium meeting will begin at 10:00 am at the Butte-Silver Bow Chamber of Commerce, 1000 George St., on Thurs., May 15.

## Upcoming Meetings

### April 21-24

Governor's Emergency Preparedness Conference  
Billings • Holiday Inn Grand, , 5500 Midland Road  
Register at: <http://eu.montana.edu/preparedness/>

### April 24

Interoperability Montana (IM) Technical Committee  
Billings • 8:00 am - noon  
Holiday Inn Grand, 5500 Midland Road

### April 24-25

Interoperability Montana (IM) Retreat  
Billings • Holiday Inn Grand, 5500 Midland Road  
Register at: <http://eu.montana.edu/preparedness/>

### April 28

IM Finance Sub-Committee Work Session  
Helena • 9:00 to noon  
Anderson and ZurMuehlen (AZ), 828 Great Northern Blvd.

### April 30

Eastern Tier (ETIC) • Glendive • 10:00 am  
Law Enforcement Center; 440 Colorado Blvd.

### May 1

NTIP Conference Call • Telephone • 9:00 am

### May 5

IM Finance Sub-Committee  
Helena • 9:00 to noon  
Anderson and ZurMuehlen (AZ), 828 Great Northern Blvd.

### May 5

IM Governance Committee  
Helena • 12:30 to 5:00  
State Capitol

### May 6

IM Project Directors (IMPD)  
Helena • 9:00 to 3:00 pm  
State Capitol